

*In the Name of God*

*The Beneficent, the Merciful*



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**Exploring EFL Instructors' Techniques and Materials in Teaching Reading to IELTS**

**Candidates: A Qualitative Research**

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Exploring EFL Instructors' Techniques and Materials in Teaching Reading to IELTS Candidates

که در تاریخ ۹۷/۱۱/۸ با حضور هیأت محترم داوران در دانشگاه صنعتی شاهرود برگزار گردید به شرح ذیل اعلام می گردد:

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تیمبره: در صورتی که کسی مردود شود حداکثر یکبار دیگر از امتحان مجاز تحصیل می تواند از پایان نامه خود دفاع نماید (دفاع مجدد نباید زودتر از ۴ ماه برگزار شود).

گروه دزویس، شاهرود

**Dedicated to**

My Dear Parents and

My Beloved Husband

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#### مالکیت نتایج و حق نشر

- کلیه حقوق معنوی این اثر و محصولات آن (مقالات مستخرج ، کتاب ، برنامه های رایانه ای ، نرم افزار ها و تجهیزات ساخته شده است ) متعلق به دانشگاه صنعتی شاهرود می باشد . این مطلب باید به نحو مقتضی در تولیدات علمی مربوطه ذکر شود .
- استفاده از اطلاعات و نتایج موجود در پایان نامه بدون ذکر مرجع مجاز نمی باشد.

## **ABSTRACT**

Teaching reading in IELTS preparatory courses is driven by the findings of theory-driven studies rather than by experienced practitioner's insights, to fill in this gap, this study aimed at exploring the techniques and materials experienced practitioners use in teaching reading in IELTS preparatory courses. Following purposive sampling procedure and in line with grounded theory, this study theoretically sampled the perspectives of twelve practitioners teaching in private language schools of Mashhad, the capital city of Central Khorasan Province, Iran. Iterative data collection and analysis yielded determining keywords, paraphrasing, reading depth, mood adjustment, test wiseness, time management, and some task-oriented techniques as commonly techniques utilized by the participants. In addition, some of the beneficial materials employed by these instructors were introduced. Definitely this study have clear implications for language teaching and learning. Previous studies gave some strategies for reading comprehension, but they never referred to the techniques which were used by the most professional IELTS instructors. Previous researches focused mostly on theories of reading strategies that they were not as useful as the techniques which were used by professional IELTS instructors in real learning situations. By conducting this research some actual and authentic techniques and guidelines, which are utilized by the best IELTS instructors, are added to the previous studies.

**Key words:** Teaching techniques, IELTS reading module, Teachers' perspectives, Theorizing

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# **Chapter one**

## **Introduction**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1. Overview**

Having a gate-keeping function the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) has attracted a lot of attraction, especially in Iran, where a great majority of the university students need it for academic purposes. Under these conditions, the IELTS has been commercialized and as such many private language schools and individuals who may not be qualified have entered language profession. This has led to dissatisfaction among IELTS candidates. However, there are also many professional language schools and individuals who follow constructive techniques in preparing candidates for this high-stake test. To address candidates concerns, this study aims at observing and interviewing professional practitioners to uncover the techniques they use in teaching reading in IELTS preparatory courses.

The findings of this study are significant in that it will provide the field with a host of down-to-earth techniques uncovered from the practice of professional practitioners. Being complementary to the findings of theory-driven studies, the findings of this study can be fed to pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. This study has clear implications for language teacher education in Iran and other similar context because in these contexts language teacher education is mainly driven by grand theories and principles of language education.

Although these grand theories are important, on their own, they cannot prepare language teachers to enter the profession because these programs do not take contextual constraints into account. To start language education effectively, university graduate need to be exposed not only to the grand theories and principles of language education but also to the grounded theories which

not only theorize practice but also familiarize language teachers with the situated nature of language teacher education.

The findings of this research will be useful for those instructors who teach reading skill needed for IELTS exam. This study's findings help IELTS teachers to find out the best and the most practical techniques of professional IELTS instructors who teach reading in the best way. The findings will be useful for IELTS teachers who use only their experiences, but by reviewing the findings of this study they have the professional IELTS teachers' experiences too. This study will be significant because researcher wants to introduce the most practical techniques which are used by the best IELTS instructors.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Nowadays, in modern world, having a good level of English proficiency is very significant, therefore trends towards standard English exams are continuously growing. Some people are projecting to study abroad, some are applying to major in an international university and some people are planning to work in an English-speaking country. Among standard English exams, IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is one of the most acceptable and valuable test required by schools, universities and companies all over the world. Achieving the IELTS language certificate and a high IELTS score aid candidates to have international academic and professional opportunities in many places in the world where English is mostly spoken. Recently many English instructors teach the basic required skills in IELTS such as reading, while they really don't know what the widely accepted and useful techniques for teaching reading are. Some of these instructors have majored in non-English disciplines, and even some have majored in English but they are not familiar with practical techniques of reading. This study aims at exploring the techniques experienced practitioners use in teaching reading in IELTS preparatory



courses. In spite of discovering practical techniques, knowing what materials are used by successful professional IELTS instructors for teaching reading can be valuable for other IELTS teachers, because there is a wide range of IELTS books and choosing the best ones among them is difficult.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

In the very context of English language teaching and learning in the researcher's country, Iran, most of the IELTS instructors are not familiar with the most practical techniques for teaching reading of IELTS. They know some techniques, but they have borrowed them from previous theories. These theories are made by some theoreticians didn't have any contact with the real learning environments such as English classes. This study is conducted to uncover the most useful techniques and materials of teaching reading. In other words, identifying the most applied techniques and the most practical materials used by the experienced IELTS instructors is the main concern of this study. To this end, the following question directs the study to obtain its main purposes:

- 1) What are the most practical techniques and materials which are used by the most successful professional IELTS instructors for teaching reading?

### **1.4. Limitations of the Study**

Although there are many successful native IELTS instructors all over the world using the most practical techniques for teaching IELTS reading, the researcher of this study is not able to get access to such cases. In addition, there are different theory-driven techniques which are used by IELTS instructors; however, this study only identifies the applied techniques according to experienced practitioner's insights. Furthermore, many IELTS instructors are not willing to share their techniques and strategies since they think the techniques they employ are kind of exclusive.

### **1.5. Delimitations of the Study**

Due to the aforementioned problems, the researcher goes to different English institutes and private IELTS schools to talk to numerous IELTS instructors so that she can elicit some techniques taken up by the majority of them and also the so-called inclusive ones. To this end, the participants of this study are restricted to those instructors who are willing to share their techniques and materials.

### **1.6. Ethical Issues**

There are some ethical issues that should be preserved by the researcher during conducting a research. The investigator who has human being subjects should take some ethical issues into account. Privacy is one of these issues. Privacy is the freedom an individual has to determine the time, extent, and general circumstances under which private information will be shared with. Participants should feel secure enough to take part in the research. The participants must be aware of the study's purposes. The researcher is not allowed to use the information he's obtained from the participants of the study against them. This information mustn't be given to anyone. The interviewees have to consent to take part in the study. In case of any kind of unwillingness at any point of the study, participants can leave the research. Bailey (1996) and Arksey and Knight (1999) recommended some items which concern informing the participants about the purpose of the research, the procedures of the research, the risk and benefits of the research, the voluntary nature of research participation, and the subject's right to stop the research at any time.



# **Chapter Two**

## **Review of the Related Literature**

## **2.1. Overview**

## **2.2. Theoretical Perspectives**

Some scholars have tried to specify what happens in the process of reading a connected text. With the emergence of cognitive psychology in the late 1960s, some scholars began to shift their attention from oral skills to reading and writing as well (Goodman, 1967; Clarke & Silberstein, 1977; Alderson & Urquhart, 1984). Goodman (1967) referred to reading as a “psycholinguistic guessing game”, stated that reading is an ongoing process in which readers select from the reading material certain cues to help them to predict what will come next in the text. Above all, Clarke and Silberstein (1977) contended that readers choose cues from texts and link them to what they already know to make predictions. Moreover, Alderson and Urquhart (1984) postulated that this psycholinguistic model of reading is an attestation of the readers’ attempt to comprehend through guess-making made possible by way of relating textual and linguistic knowledge to background information.

Reading has been variedly defined by some scholars (Carroll, 1964; Grellet ,1981; Urquhart and Weir,1998; Wolf, 2007; Koda ,2004). Grellet (1981) and Urquhart and Weir (1998) believe that reading entails constructing meaning from written text. On the other hand, Carroll (1964) explicitly associates reading with the reconstruction of a spoken message. Rather than focusing on the output of the reading process, Wolf (2007) and Koda (2004) focused on the cognitive and neurological operations involved in reading. In line with the aforementioned statement, Barton (2007) offers a broad definition of reading that goes beyond mediation around a text. Smith (2004, 2007), meanwhile, stresses the cognitive dimension of reading, asserting that reading and thought are inseparable.

According to the definitions of the reading, there are some goals for reading. Comprehension, the ability to go beyond the words, is the main goal for reading and everything else is a means to this end (Goldenberg, 2011; Loew, 1984). The ability to understand the ideas in a text and the relationships that exist between those ideas is called comprehension (McNamara, 2007). According to traditional views of reading, readers as passive recipients of text information, possessing a large number of sub-skills which automatically apply them to comprehend all kinds of texts; that is, it was assumed that reading comprehension occurred automatically (Dole, 2000; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Then a conceptual shift to a cognitive model of learning in the 1970's led to a different view of the reader as a result of a rethinking about the underlying processes in reading comprehension. Cognitive views of reading comprehension indicate that reading is an interactive and comprehension is a constructive process and that skilled readers are differentiated from weak readers by their flexible use of a set of strategies to make sense of the text and to monitor and regulate their reading processes (Baker & Brown, 1984; Dole et al., 1991).

In some second/foreign language (L2) situations, where L2 input sources are limited, reading can be considered as a viable means of developing L2 ability (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010) which, in turn, can facilitate or hinder academic success for many L2 learners across educational contexts (Taylor et al., 2006). Grabe and Stoller (2002) stressed that to become a highly proficient L2 reader is very difficult. Snow (2002) found that many L2 learners have difficulties in understanding what they read especially academic texts. Also, academic second language readers, though they have adequate language competency, to some extent still have difficulties in comprehending those academic texts thoroughly (Eskey, 2005). It seems that L2 students lack proper metacognitive strategies to manage their own reading effectively. Students are uncertain of what metacognitive strategies are and how to use them. Poor readers, especially, do not know what

methods are efficient for academic reading, nor do they know how to improve their reading ability. Noticeably, in academic reading comprehension, if students lack metacognitive knowledge, they feel puzzled in adopting the appropriate reading methods and reading strategies (Shokrpour & Fotovatian, 2009). As a result, they cannot self-plan, self-monitor, self-regulate and self-evaluate their own reading skills properly.

Background knowledge may enhance comprehension, but its impact seems to be limited. A stream of research suggests that levels of L2 language knowledge constrict the power of background knowledge (Al-Shumaimeri, 2006; Carrell, 1991; Clapham, 1996; Hudson, 1982; Ridgway, 1997; Yuet Hung Chan, 2003). Clapham (1996) suggested the possibility of two linguistic thresholds affecting the power of background knowledge. In her data, students with either low (below 60%) or high (above 80%) L2 language knowledge scores did not benefit from background knowledge. Some studies support the upper end of this threshold (Al-Shumaimeri, 2006; Carrell, 1991; Clapham, 1996; Hudson, 1982; Ridgway, 1997; Yuet Hung Chan, 2003), and others support the lower end (e.g., Carrell, 1991; Clapham, 1996; Uso-Juan, 2006). Carrell (1991) explained that low L2 language knowledge readers do not use their background knowledge because they are text-bound and must meet a minimum threshold of L2 language knowledge in order to apply background knowledge. Regarding background knowledge and high level L2 learners Al-Shumaimeri (2006), suggested that these readers show no effects for background knowledge because “their language knowledge freed their cognitive resources to make effective use of the skills and strategies of their comprehension procedures” (p. 12). The studies reviewed here show that L2 language knowledge can confine the positive effects of background knowledge for lower and higher L2 language knowledge readers.

Similar to background knowledge, reading comprehension strategies are a critical component in L2 reading. Reading comprehension strategies, in this paper, are referred to as the conscious actions readers use to repair breakdowns in comprehension (cognitive strategies) or the deliberate actions readers use to monitor and oversee those attempts at repair (metacognitive strategies) (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Examining both cognitive and metacognitive strategies, studies consistently report that more proficient L2 readers (i.e., students who have high reading comprehension scores and/or those with high L2 language knowledge) differ from less proficient L2 readers in the ways that they use strategies (Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986, 1992; Horiba, 1996; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2006; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996; Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Less proficient readers in these studies were commonly characterized as: (1) using language-based, bottom-up strategies; (2) lacking the awareness and resources in order to repair comprehension break-downs; and (3) being absent of the knowledge needed to evaluate their attempts at comprehension repair. Some scholars argue that these patterns in strategy use are largely due to deficiencies in decoding skills, lexical knowledge, and syntactical knowledge (e.g., Alderson, 1984; Clarke, 1979; Koda, 2007; Nassaji, 2007). Furthermore, due to the attention devoted to the language based features, low level L2 language knowledge learners have fewer resources to apply to higher-level cognitive or metacognitive strategies. Taken together, this vein of research illustrates qualitative differences between learners that have higher levels of L2 language knowledge and learners that possess lower levels of L2 language knowledge.

Strategies for language learning and language use have been receiving ever growing attention in the areas of L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Brown, 1991; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Cohen & Weaver, 2005; Cohen, 1990; Grabe, 2010; McDonough, 1995;



Mendelsohn, 1994; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985a; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Küpper, 1985b; Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, & Sumrall, 1993; Rubin & Thompson, 1994; Rubin, 1975; Rubin, 1981; Stern, 1975; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1991). The most general finding among these inquires was that the use of appropriate language learning strategies leads to improved proficiency or achievement overall or in specific skill areas. These studies also supported the notion that the use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). In line with that, it appears to be extremely important that teachers of L2 learning should learn to identify and comprehend how the strategies of their students are functioned in varied language activities. Further, O'Malley et al. (1985b) suggested that the learning strategies of good language learners, once identified and successfully taught, could have considerable potential for enhancing the development of language skills.

Some researchers argued that reading strategies, like learning strategies, are considered in two major categories: cognitive and metacognitive (Devine, 1993; Flavell, 1981; Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 354). The cognitive strategies the readers use help them in constructing meaning from the text. In addition to previous statement, metacognitive strategies are used to monitor or regulate cognitive strategies (Devine, 1993; Flavell, 1981). They include, “checking the outcome of any attempt to solve a problem, planning one’s next move, monitoring the effectiveness of any attempted action, testing, revising, and evaluating one’s strategies for learning” (Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 354). In other words, “skimming a text for key information involves using a cognitive strategy, whereas assessing the effectiveness of skimming for gathering textual information would

be a metacognitive strategy” (Devine, 1993, p. 112). Choosing an effective strategy depends on many factors including the nature of the task, individual learner differences, such as language learning aptitude, prior experience in learning other foreign languages, personality characteristics, and the current and intended levels of language proficiency.

Comprehension strategies focus on how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand (Johnston, 1983; Langer, 1982; Hosenfeld, 1977). Strategies, therefore, reveal a reader's resources for understanding (Langer, 1982). Johnston (1983) identifies two types of strategies: One aids the reader in constructing a model of the meaning of text, a framework for understanding; the other is used to monitor understanding and take action when necessary. Hosenfeld's (1977) division of strategies into "main meaning line" and "word-solving strategies" and Olshavsky's (1976-1977) into "clause related" and "word related" also distinguish between levels of strategies.

Many researchers have compared the performance of "good" and "poor" readers (Gambrell & Heathington, 1981; Garner, 1980; Hare, 1981; Kavale & Schreiner, 1979; Olshavsky, 1976-1977; Smith, 1967; Strang & Rogers, 1965) or older and younger readers (Bauman, 1982; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1984). Others (Baker, 1979; Fareed, 1971; Johnston & Afflerbach, 1983; Olson et al., 1984) have studied the strategy use of competent readers. The results of some studies suggest that good readers are more able to monitor their comprehension than poor readers are, that they are more aware of the strategies they use than are poor readers, and that they use strategies more flexibly. Specifically, good readers adjust their strategies to the type of text they are reading and to the purpose for which they are reading (Smith, 1967; Strang & Rogers, 1965). They distinguish between important information and details as they read and are able to use clues in the text to anticipate information and/or relate new information with information already stated (Olson

et al., 1984). They are able to notice inconsistencies in a text and employ strategies to make these inconsistencies understandable (Baker, 1979; Garner, 1980; Hare, 1981).

Other studies (Bauman, 1982; Fareed, 1971; Kavale & Schreiner, 1979; Olshavsky, 1976-1977; Piekarz, 1956; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1984) suggest that readers differ in their overall approach to the text rather than in the specific strategies they use. While these studies provide information about certain types of readers, it is difficult to compare results across studies, since the age and grade level of participants, the tasks, and the reading material vary from study to study. Even the categories of strategies vary from study to study. Moreover, these studies do not adequately account for diversity within groups of readers (Kleiman, 1982).

Generally, researchers who deal with the strategy use of second language readers fall into two groups. One group declares that the ability to read in a second language is largely dependent on the proficiency in that language (Clarke, 1979; Czikó, 1980; Macnamara, 1970). Therefore, language skills improve in a linear advancement, moving from lower level letter- and word-level skills to higher level cognitive ones. The other group declares that higher level strategies developed in a first language can be transferred to a second language and can operate alongside lower processing strategies (Benedetto, 1984; Coady, 1979; Cummins, 1980; K. Goodman, 1973; Hudson, 1982). These researchers believe that as language proficiency develops, linguistic cues can be used more efficiently and that predictions and other cognitive processes will therefore operate more smoothly. Cognitive strategies, however, are applied throughout the process.

Many studies (Carrell, 1995; Chamot, 2005; Wenden, 2001) have addressed the positive effects of utilizing metacognitive strategies in the reading process. Among language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies are regarded as high order executive skills that make use of knowledge of cognitive processes and constitute an attempt to regulate ones' own learning by

means of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. When applied to reading, metacognitive strategies are self-monitoring and self-regulating activities, focusing on both the process and the product of reading. They include the readers' perception of whether or not they can comprehend what they read; their ability to judge the cognitive demands of reading task; and their knowledge of when and how to employ a specific cognitive reading strategy according to text difficulty, situational constraints, and the reader's own cognitive abilities (Baker & Brown, 1984; Gourgey, 2001; Hamdan, Ghafar, Sihes, & Atan, 2010). It has been suggested, "Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to review their progress, accomplishments, and future learning directions" (O'Malley et al., 1985b, p. 561). The use of metacognitive strategies in the reading process has been generally supported as a valuable aid for its cognitive, social, linguistic benefits.

Some scholars clarified the meanings of bottom-up, top-down, and interactive models of reading (Stanovich, 1980; Phakiti, 2006; Eskey, 2005; Goodman, 1967; Grabe, 2009; Alderson, 2000; Grabe, 1991; McLeod & McLaughlin, 1986). Currently the most prevalent metaphors in the literature are the bottom-up, top-down, and interactive models of reading to improve comprehension. Bottom-up processing model lays primary emphasis on textual decoding. It is the mechanical, word-driven process in which readers move from lower-level processes to higher-level processes (Stanovich, 1980; Phakiti, 2006). That is, readers attend to individual letters and words, utter them out, and eventually figure out the structure of and assign meaning to larger syntactic units. Lower-level (i.e., bottom-up) processes are comprised of a variety of complex skills (e.g., word-recognition, word-integration or syntactic parsing, and proposition formation) (Eskey, 2005). In contrast, top-down models place primary emphasis on reader interpretation and prior knowledge. They are seen as concept-driven, in the sense that the text is "sampled" and

predictions are made on the basis of the reader's prior syntactic and semantic knowledge (Goodman, 1967). This processing model is the hypothesis-driven process in which readers, directed by their goals, expectations and strategic processing, actively control the comprehension process (Grabe, 2009). They generate hypotheses and use their background knowledge and experiences to make inferences. For example, they form predictions of what will come next, test their predictions and verify or adjust them. They resort to decoding symbols only when comprehension breaks down.

According to the basic assumption underlying the testing of languages, some investigators claimed that test tasks should reflect both the cognitive processes engaged by the reader and textual features of reading tasks encountered in the wider domain of real-world tasks to which test performance is intended to generalize (Weir, 2005; Alderson, 2000; Bachman and Palmer,1996). Bachman and Palmer (1996) have argued that both situational authenticity (concerning the extent to which test tasks reflect salient contextual features) and interactional authenticity (concerning the extent to which test tasks educe cognitive processes analogous to those employed in the target language use domain) are essential features of useful test tasks. Weir (2005) draws a similar distinction between what he describes as 'context' and 'cognitive' validities and Alderson (2000) lists relevant features of the text and of the reader that will impact on the comprehensibility of a reading passage.

Many researchers, employing think-aloud or verbal reports, have examined the types of strategies L2 readers use for comprehension as well as the relationship between L1 and L2 reading strategies (Block, 1986; Davies & Bistodeau, 1993; Horiba, 1990; Koda, 1988). Researchers have also investigated possible effects of training on L2 readers' use of strategies (Anderson, 1991; Auerbach & Paxton, 1997; Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto ,1989; Cotterall, 1990). As part of strategy

studies there has also been an emphasis on determining the strategies that L2 readers use in various reading contexts. Anderson (1991), for example, investigated the extent to which reading comprehension processes during a test reflect the comprehension processes during academic reading. The results indicated that processing strategies used while taking a standardized reading comprehension test and while reading for academic purposes are very similar.

Search reading is one of the strategies to teach the reading skill of IELTS that some researchers referred to it (Urquhart & Weir, 1998; Dreher, 1992; Guthrie & Kirsch, 1987; Symons & Specht, 1994; Enright et al., 2000). Search reading is one of the reading strategies which is used by candidates to find specific information and answer as quickly and accurately as possible in reading examinations. Search reading is defined by Urquhart and Weir (1998) as the strategy used to locate and comprehend discrete pieces of information on predetermined topics in order to answer a set of questions or provide data. According to the authors, the readers do not necessarily have to start by reading the whole text to get the gist. Moreover, search reading seems to be compatible at different points with scanning, skimming, and 'careful global reading' (i.e. comprehension of the main ideas in the text). Search reading is also addressed by other authors such as Dreher (1992), Guthrie and Kirsch (1987), Symons and Specht (1994), as well as Enright et al. (2000) specifically in relation to English language reading examinations.

Instructional materials provide much of the language input as some investigators stated (Richard, 2001; Tomlinson, Dat, Masuhara, & Rubdy, 2001; Masuhara, Haan, Yi, & Tomlinson, 2008). The reality is that most commercially produced materials focus on informing their users about language features and on guiding them to practise these features, a fact that is highlighted by Richard (2001) argued that instructional materials generally serve as the basis of much of the language input that learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. The

same point is made by Tomlinson, Dat, Masuhara, and Rubdy (2001), Masuhara, Haan, Yi, and Tomlinson (2008) in their reviews of currently used adult EFL course books: both conclude that the emphasis in most course books is on providing explicit teaching and practice.

In recent years examinations such as IELTS have become widely used as an indicator of proficiency in English, defining language proficiency for international students is no easy endeavour. The traditional view, which “has entailed viewing proficiency as little more than grammar and lexis” (Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1990, p.7), has, in more recent years, been recognised as quite inadequate, and a great deal of time, money and effort has gone into developing testing systems which reflect the growing awareness of the need for a broader view of language proficiency. The concept of proficiency has been linked to the degree of skill with which a language can be used (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992). Although Oller (1979) suggested that all elements of language derive from a single underlying skill which cannot be divided into discrete components (a view suggesting that performance in, for instance, reading and listening relies on the same underlying language skills, and that other aspects of linguistic competence such as pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are all part of the same general proficiency) other research has supported the concept that proficiency consists of a complex amalgamation of a number of interrelated factors (Bachman, 1990). The view of proficiency as a multi-dimensional phenomenon implies that it is valid to test for discrete language abilities (such as listening or writing) when assessing proficiency and that results relating to discrete elements of language may or may not relate to other areas of competence. A high score for reading, for example, may not necessarily indicate that a student can engage in fluent conversation.

IELTS superseded the earlier English Language Testing Service (ELTS), first conceived in 1976 and introduced in 1980 by the British Council. The ELTS test was originally designed as

a test for prospective postgraduate students, but there was a growing demand from other student groups and receiving institutions, especially in Australia. In 1988 Criper and Davies undertook a study of the practicality, validity, and reliability of ELTS and recommended some simplification and shortening of the test. A compromise was sought ‘between practicality and maximum predictive power’ (Alderson and Clapham 1992: 1). The number of subject-specific modules was reduced from six to four, and the Non-Academic test was replaced by the General Training Module. In addition, ‘International’ was taken as a prefix to acknowledge the involvement from 1989 of the International Development Program Education Australia (IDPEA), who joined the British Council and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) in managing the test. One important advantage of this aspect of the test’s management was that it helped to prevent any perception of Eurocentric bias and instead ensured a fully international perspective.

Since IELTS examines candidates on all four skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking), it would seem reasonable to suggest that a useful IELTS preparation course needs to focus on the strategies required to develop skills in all of these four areas. Although issues surrounding the concept of “strategy” as applied to language learning have been long debated and remain controversial (Cohen, 1998; Dornyei and Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 1994; Green and Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003a, 2003b; O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper and Russo, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1987), Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford (2003, p.319) suggest that “virtually all definitions of strategies imply conscious movement towards a language goal”. For the purposes of this study, the goal under investigation was language skills development (LSD). The study examined the strategies used by students in the process of developing these skills, and how these strategies relate to success in a skills-focussed examination



(IELTS). According to the findings of Green and Oxford (1995) and Griffiths (2003b), it would be predicted that more successful students would report more frequent strategy use than less successful students.

### **2.3. Empirical Findings**

Some scholars support a view toward reading, a view that points to the fact that successful reading incorporates a simultaneous use of three sources of language: linguistic, textual, and background (Steffensen, Joag-dev, & Anderson, 1979; Johnson, 1981; Johnson, 1982; Obah, 1983; Aron, 1986; Nelson, 1987). Linguistic knowledge refers to one's knowledge of lexis, syntax, and semantics; textual knowledge involves one's perception of coherence and cohesion as they are technically discussed by Halliday and Hasan (1976); and the last kind of knowledge embraces whatever one knows about the state of affairs in the real world. They report the benefits of background knowledge on L2 reading comprehension and they have operationalized background knowledge in a multitude of ways. For example, some studies examined background knowledge in terms of the culture represented in the text and found that when readers were familiar with that culture, they scored significantly better on comprehension measures (e.g., Alptekin, 2006; Johnson, 1981, 1982; Lee, 2007; Steffensen, Joag-dev, & Anderson, 1979).

Some scholars (Carrell, 1991; Al-Shumaimeri, 2006) found that low L2 language knowledge readers do not use their background knowledge because they are text-bound and must meet a minimum threshold of L2 language knowledge in order to apply background knowledge. Regarding background knowledge and high level L2 learners, Al-Shumaimeri (2006) suggested that these readers show no effects for background knowledge because their language knowledge freed their cognitive resources to make effective use of the skills and strategies of their

comprehension procedures. These studies show that L2 language knowledge can confine the positive effects of background knowledge for lower and higher L2 language knowledge readers.

Some researchers concluded that there are some reading comprehension strategies that enhance comprehension (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Fung, Wilkinson, & Moore, 2003; Harris, 2007; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2003; Macaro & Elrer, 2008; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Zhang, 2008). In addition to some research illustrating differences in strategy use among L2 readers, other research indicates that reading comprehension strategies can be taught and that teaching them enhances comprehension. With the exception of Ikeda and Takeuchi (2003), these studies report significant improvements in reading comprehension for students receiving explicit strategy instruction at low (Fung, Wilkinson, & Moore, 2003; Song, 1998) and intermediate (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Taylor, Stevens, & Asher, 2006; Zhang, 2008) levels of L2 language knowledge. Song (1998) found significant improvements in reading comprehension for both low and intermediate language knowledge groups. Song divided 68 Korean university students into low, intermediate, and high proficiency groups and provided them with 14 weeks of strategy training through a Reciprocal Teaching method (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Following the treatment, both the low and intermediate groups showed significant increases in reading comprehension.

## **2.4. Summary of Empirical Findings**

In Reading three sources of language are involved: linguistic, textual, and background (Steffensen, Joag-dev, & Anderson, 1979; Johnson, 1981; Johnson, 1982; Obah, 1983; Aron, 1986; and Nelson, 1987). Background knowledge, understood as the content area knowledge or topic familiarity learners possess regarding texts, has been researched in L2 reading for decades. The theoretical

underpinnings of background knowledge inquiry are usually traced back to schema theory. The thrust behind schema theory is that comprehension is composed of two parts—a linguistic component responsible for decoding text and sending information to the brain, and a conceptual component that connects this information to pre-existing knowledge structures (i.e., schema).

Some studies referred to the benefits of background knowledge on L2 reading comprehension. Some studies examined background knowledge in terms of the culture represented in the text and found that when readers were familiar with that culture, they scored significantly better on comprehension measures (e.g., Alptekin, 2006; Johnson, 1981, 1982; Lee, 2007; Steffensen, Joag-dev, & Anderson, 1979). Some scholars explained that low L2 language knowledge readers do not use their background knowledge because they are text-bound and must meet a minimum threshold of L2 language knowledge in order to apply background knowledge (Carrell, 1991; Al-Shumaimeri, 2006).

There are some reading comprehension strategies. Some researches indicate that reading comprehension strategies can be taught and that teaching them enhances comprehension (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Fung, Wilkinson, & Moore, 2003; Harris, 2007; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2003; Macaro & Elrer, 2008; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Zhang, 2008). Some researchers believe that those students receiving explicit strategy instruction at low (Fung, Wilkinson, & Moore, 2003; Song, 1998) and intermediate (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Taylor, Stevens, & Asher, 2006; Zhang, 2008) levels of L2 language knowledge will get significant improvements in reading comprehension. Song (1998) found significant improvements in reading comprehension for both low and intermediate language knowledge groups.

By reviewing previous studies, it can be concluded that there is a gap in teaching reading for IELTS teachers. Many English instructors are teaching reading skill during preparatory courses

of IELTS, while they really don't know what the widely accepted and useful techniques for teaching reading are. They only use the principles based on some theories. These teachers need the practical methods which are used by professional instructors. In spite of discovering practical techniques, knowing what reading materials are used by successful IELTS instructors can also be valuable for other IELTS teachers. In the past, researchers only presented some reading comprehension strategies were based on some theories. These strategies were for learners not for teachers. Teachers need some techniques and guidelines which express how to teach.



# **Chapter Three**

## **Methodology**

### **3.1. Overview**

In the following sections, the method through which and the instrument by which the study is conducted will be stated. In addition, sampling procedure, participants' characteristics, data collection, data analysis, and design of the study will be discussed.

### **3.2. Grounded Theory**

The method which is used in this study is grounded theory (GT) which is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data. The two popular approaches to grounded theory are the systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and the constructivist approach of Charmaz (2005, 2006). In this study the systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin was used. In the more systematic, analytic procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), the investigator seeks to systematically develop a theory that explains process, action, or interaction on a topic. The researcher typically conducts some interviews based on several visits "to the field" to collect interview data to saturate the categories (or find information that continues to add to them until no more can be found). A category represents a unit of information composed of events, happenings, and instances (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher also collects and analyzes observations and documents, but these data forms are often not used. While the researcher collects data, she or he begins analysis. The participants interviewed are theoretically chosen (called theoretical sampling) to help the researcher best form the theory. How many passes one makes to the field depends on whether the categories of information become saturated and whether the theory is elaborated in all of its complexity. This process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories is called the constant comparative method of data analysis. The researcher begins with open coding, coding the data for its major categories of information. From this coding, axial coding emerges in which the researcher identifies one open coding category to focus on (called the "core" phenomenon), and then goes

back to the data and create categories around this core phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin (1990) prescribe the types of categories identified around the core phenomenon.

The three basic elements of grounded theory are concepts, categories and propositions. Concepts are the basic units of analysis since it is from conceptualization of data, not the actual data per se, that theory is developed. Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 7) state that: Theories can't be built with actual incidents or activities as observed or reported; that is, from "raw data." The incidents, events, happenings are taken as, or analyzed as, potential indicators of phenomena, which are thereby given conceptual labels. If a respondent says to the researcher, "Each day I spread my activities over the morning, resting between shaving and bathing," then the researcher might label this phenomenon as "pacing." As the researcher encounters other incidents, and when after comparison to the first, they appear to resemble the same phenomena, then these, too, can be labelled as "pacing." Only by comparing incidents and naming like phenomena with the same term can the theorist accumulate the basic units for theory.

The second element of grounded theory, categories, are defined by Corbin and Strauss (1990, p.7) thus: Categories are higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent. They are generated through the same analytic process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences that is used to produce lower level concepts. Categories are the "cornerstones" of developing theory. They provide the means by which the theory can be integrated. We can show how the grouping of concepts forms categories by continuing with the example presented above. In addition to the concept of "pacing," the analyst might generate the concepts of "self-medicating", "resting," and "watching one's diet." While coding, the analyst may note that, although these concepts are different in form, they seem to represent activities directed toward a similar process."



The third element of grounded theory are propositions which indicate generalized relationships between a category and its concepts and between discrete categories. This third element was originally termed 'hypotheses' by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It is felt that the term 'propositions' is more appropriate since, as Whetten (1989, p. 492) correctly points out, "propositions involve conceptual relationships whereas hypotheses require measured relationships". Since the grounded approach produces conceptual and not measured relationships, the former term is preferred. The generation and development of concepts, categories and propositions is an iterative process. Grounded theory is not generated *a priori* and then subsequently tested. Rather, it is: ... inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory should stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 23).

Grounded theory is a research methodology which operates almost in a reverse fashion from social science research in the positivist tradition. Grounded theory has considerable significance because it (a) provides explicit, sequential guidelines for conducting qualitative research; (b) offers specific strategies for handling the analytic phases of inquiry; (c) streamlines and integrates data collection and analysis; (d) advances conceptual analysis of qualitative data; and (e) legitimizes qualitative research as scientific inquiry. Grounded theory methods have earned their place as a standard social research method and have influenced researchers from varied disciplines and professions. Five analytic phases of grounded theory building were identified: research design, data collection, data ordering, data analysis, and literature comparison.

### **3.3. Sampling Procedure and Participants**

Grounded theory uses non-probability sampling. In order for concepts and categories to emerge during the data analysis, the need for sampling of specific data sources continues until each category is saturated. Therefore, at the beginning of the study, there are no limits set on the number of the participants, interviewees or data sources. The researcher continues selecting interviewees until they are saying nothing new about the concepts being explored. According to systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1990) the participants interviewed are theoretically chosen (called theoretical sampling) to help the researcher best form the theory. The sample of this study consisted of 12 experienced IELTS instructors (eleven males and one female) teaching in different English language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. Mashhad is one of the five major cities in Iran. It is located in the eastern parts of the country. Participants were all chosen based on the purposive and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling technique works like chain referral in which after observing the initial subject, the researcher asked for assistance from the subject to help identify people with a similar trait of interest. The sample was selected purposively among numerous IELTS teachers with at least more than 10 years of experience. Most of them majored in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). These teachers are successful in the field of IELTS test. They were selected on the basis of teaching experience and willingness to share their views and experience. The researcher stopped sampling after interviewing twelve participants because theoretical saturation was achieved after iterative data collection from the twelfth participant.

### **3.4. Data Collection**

As revealed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the research questions that the inquirer asks of participants will focus on understanding how individuals experience the process and identifying the steps in the process. After initially exploring these issues, the researcher then returns to the participants and asks more detailed questions that help to shape the axial coding phase. These questions are typically asked in interviews, although other forms of data may also be collected, such as observations, documents, and audiovisual materials. The point is to gather enough information to fully develop (or saturate) the model. In grounded theory, data collection is cyclical (iterative) which starts with the open-ended interviews. To collect data in this study, researcher utilized both interview and observation.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

In grounded theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected. Data analysis is central to grounded theory building research. For the study as a whole, data collection, data ordering, and data analysis are interrelated. For each case in grounded theory, data analysis involves generating concepts through the process of coding which represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

Coding is the fundamental analytic process used by the researcher. In grounded theory research, there are three basic types of coding: open, axial, and selective. Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically. Its purpose is to give the analyst new insights by breaking through standard ways of thinking about or interpreting phenomena reflected in the data. In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories, and the

relationships tested against data. Also, further development of categories takes place and one continues to look for indications of them. Through the "coding paradigm" of conditions, context, strategies (action/interaction), and consequences, subcategories are related to a category. Selective coding is the process by which all categories are unified around a "core" category, and categories that need further explication are filled-in with descriptive detail. This type of coding is likely to occur in the later phases of a study.

The analysis of the data proceeds in stages. In open coding, the researcher forms categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information. Within each category, the investigator finds several properties, or subcategories, and looks for data to dimensionalize, or show the extreme possibilities on a continuum of, the property. In axial coding, the investigator assembles the data in new ways after open coding. This is presented using a coding paradigm or logic diagram (i.e., a visual model) in which the researcher identifies a central phenomenon (i.e., a central category about the phenomenon), explores causal conditions (i.e., categories of conditions that influence the phenomenon), specifies strategies (i.e., the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon), identifies the 'context and intervening conditions (i.e., the narrow and broad conditions that influence the strategies), and delineates the consequences (i.e., the outcomes of the strategies) for this phenomenon. In selective coding, the researcher may write a 'story line' that connects the categories. Alternatively, propositions or hypotheses may be specified that state predicted relationships. Finally, the researcher may develop and visually portray a conditional matrix that elucidates the social, historical, and economic conditions influencing the central phenomenon. It is an optional step and one in which the qualitative inquirer thinks about the model from the smallest to the broadest perspective.

### **3.6. Design of the Study**

The first step of this study was understanding the perspectives behind the grounded theory which is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data. A grounded theory is a theory that is induced from the data rather than preceding them. The three basic elements of grounded theory are concepts, categories and propositions. Concepts are the basic units of analysis since it is from conceptualization of data, not the actual data per se, that theory is developed. The second element of grounded theory, categories, are higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent. They are generated through the same analytic process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences that is used to produce lower level concepts. The third element of grounded theory are propositions which indicate generalized relationships between a category and its concepts and between discrete categories.

In this study the researcher will choose twelve experienced and professional IELTS instructors purposively. These teachers are successful in the field of IELTS test. A list of participants is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

Teacher Participant	Age	Gender	Education
T.P.1	45	Male	B.A. in Electronics CELTA holder
T.P.2	33	Male	M.A. in TEFL
T.P.3	30	Male	M.A. in English Teaching TESOL holder
T.P.4	35	Male	Ph.D. in Philosophy of Art M.A. in TEFL
T.P.5	38	Male	B.A. in English Translation CELTA holder
T.P.6	35	Male	M.A. in English Teaching
T.P.7	48	Male	M.A. in TEFL CELTA & TESOL holder
T.P.8	53	Male	English Teacher
T.P.9	32	Male	M.A. in TEFL
T.P.10	24	Male	M.A. in English Literature
T.P.11	23	Male	B.A. in English Literature
T.P.12	34	Female	M.A. in English Teaching

The next step was data collection. In grounded theory, data collection is cyclical (iterative) which starts with the open-ended interviews. To collect data in this study, researcher utilized both interview and observation.

In grounded theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected. Data analysis is central to grounded theory building research. For the study as a whole, data collection, data ordering, and data analysis are interrelated. For each case in grounded theory, data analysis involves generating concepts through the process of coding which represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

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# **Chapter Four**

## **Results**



#### **4.1. Overview**

The purpose of this study was to seek for the most practical techniques and materials for teaching reading of IELTS. Although IELTS instructors are utilizing some common techniques, they have borrowed them from previous theories. These theories are made by some theoreticians didn't have any contact with the real learning environments such as English classes. In this study researcher was going to find some of the professional IELTS teachers and to seek for the most useful techniques of teaching reading using by them. The main goal of this chapter is to present a description of the EFL instructors' strategies and materials in teaching reading to IELTS candidates. Iterative data collection and analysis of the techniques and materials used by reading instructors preparing candidates for the IELTS reading module yielded a semantic network which schematically represented the materials and methods used by IELTS instructors, a code relation browser which shows the degree of overlap between emerged codes, and a set of bar charts showing the degree to which the emerged techniques are grounded in the texts fed to the MAXQDA.

#### **4.2. Semantic Network**

After collecting and analyzing data, MAXQDA software was used to show the data through some graphical charts. One of which is the semantic map (figure 1.) which represents the categories and sub categories through a map. As shown in the semantic map, collected data was classified in Pre-IELTS and IELTS parts. In pre-IELTS we have pre-IELTS techniques and pre-IELTS materials. IELTS part is also divided into two parts: IELTS techniques (task-oriented techniques and general techniques) and IELTS materials. Pre-IELTS techniques are such as skimming, scanning, determining keywords, reading depth, extensive reading, and intensive reading. Pre-IELTS materials which are recommended by some successful teachers are 'Grammar in Use series' and

‘Oxford Word Skills series’. In addition, these well-known instructors address some beneficial techniques for true/false/not given, yes/no/not given, sentence completion, table completion, summary completion, multiple choice questions, paragraph headings, and matching questions. Moreover, some practical IELTS materials are introduced such as Vocabulary for IELTS, Grammar for IELTS, The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS, Improve Your Reading Skill, IELTS Master Class, New Insights to IELTS, and Complete IELTS.

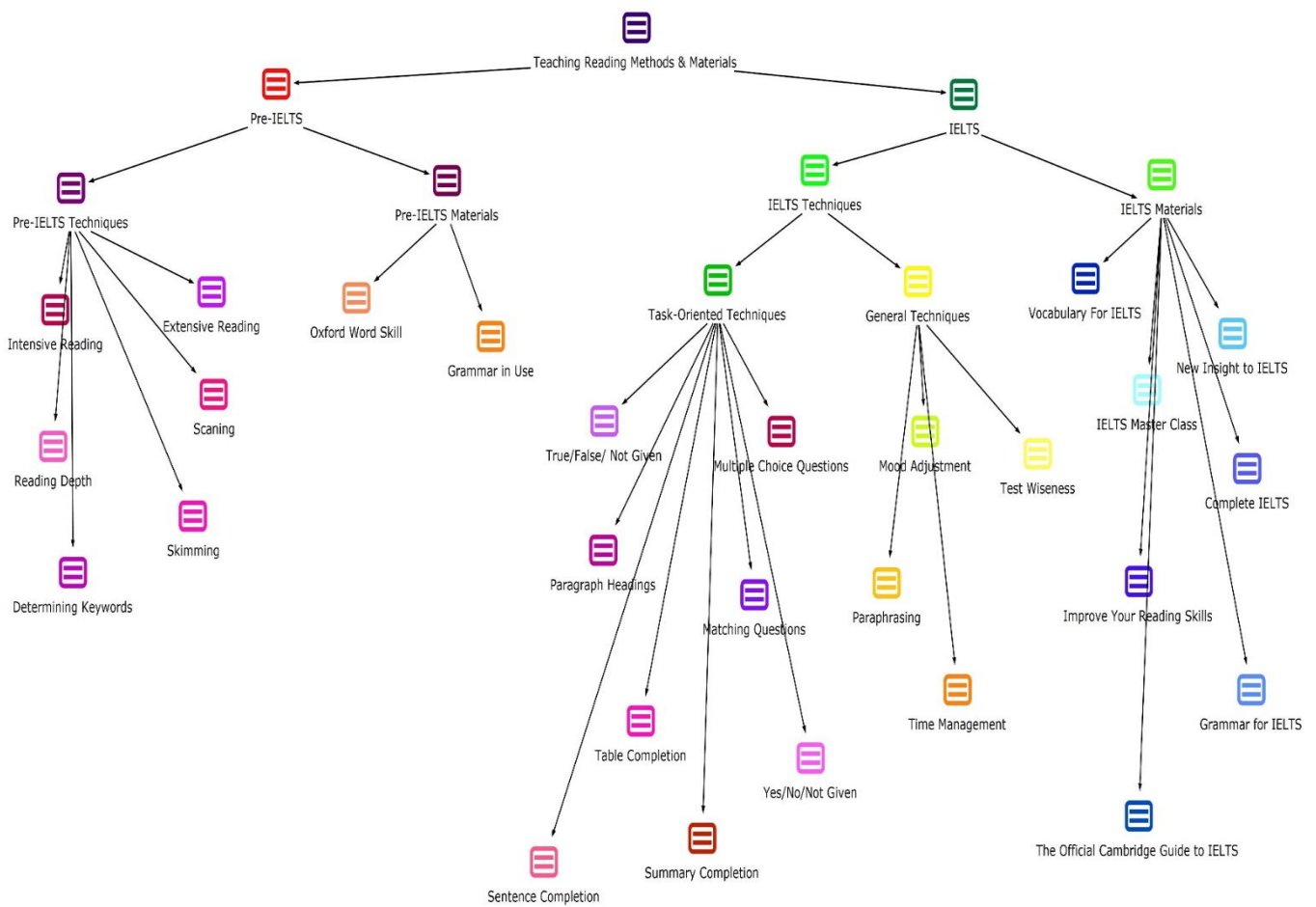


Figure 1. Semantic Map

### **4.3. Synopsis of the Emerged Techniques**

#### **4.3.1. Pre-IELTS**

All those candidates participate in preparatory IELTS courses are not at the same level of English proficiency. They attend in these courses in different ages. They have various educational background knowledge and they also have different intention for being attended in such classes.

##### **4.3.1.1. Pre-IELTS Techniques**

In Pre-IELTS courses English learners should try to improve their English proficiency level. Some techniques are needed to be used to promote IELTS candidates' levels. Pre-IELTS techniques which are stated by participants are skimming, scanning, determining keywords, reading depth, extensive reading, and intensive reading. There are some techniques should be used basically in reading skill. For example, skimming and scanning are two very different strategies for increasing the pace of the reading. They are each used for different purposes, and they are not meant to be used all the time. They are at the fast end of the speed reading range, while studying, without understanding how to speed up your reading is at the slow end.

###### **4.3.1.1.1. Skimming**

Skimming is one of the techniques you can use to read more in less time. One of the participants declared: "when a reader looks for general or main ideas of the text, skimming takes place. When you are skimming, you are not searching for specific words or phrases" (T.P.1.) Moreover, (T.P.3) stated: "For those questions that they have some special keywords such as proper nouns, utilizing skimming is the best technique in reading part." The other participant said: "Skimming is one of the general techniques a reader can employ to function better in reading part." (T.P.5)

#### **4.3.1.1.2. Scanning**

Scanning is another useful technique for speeding up your reading. Unlike skimming, when you are scanning, you are looking only for a specific fact or special piece of information. One of the participant asserted: “Scanning and skimming are the two basic techniques that every English learner should take into account to be successful in reading part of a test.” (T.P.2). The other interviewee stated that: “when you are looking for some exact and special piece of information, you are using scanning technique. Scanning is a technique that makes distinguishes between the previous reading texts and the reading passages for standard exams in which first of all, you should search for keywords in the questions and then according to those key words, you can find the possible answers to those questions.” (T.P.1)

#### **4.3.1.1.3. Determining Keywords**

Key words play very essential role in different strategies of reading skill especially in skimming and scanning. An important part of skimming the passage is underlining keywords. While you are reading the passage, you can identify important keywords in the paragraphs that will also help you to better understand the given information. (T.P.9) declared that while you are skimming and scanning, you can keep the keywords of the questions in your mind. When you determine he keywords, it helps you to comprehend the reading text quickly and effectively.

#### **4.3.1.1.4. Reading Depth**

Deep reading is the active process of thoughtful and deliberate reading carried out to enhance one's comprehension and enjoyment of a text. It contrasts with skimming and superficial reading. It is also called slow reading. Reading deeply was also mentioned by one of the participants as a crucial factor for having an effective reading. To this regard, one of the participant talked about his ideas

as follows: Generally, the three fundamental tools for reading skill that I always introduce to all of my English learners are reading deeply, skimming, and scanning. If learners know which part of the text should be read and how to read that piece of reading, it will improve his or her reading ability. Reading deeply save your time during the test. (T.P.5)

#### **4.3.1.1.5. Extensive Reading**

Extensive reading involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. It can be compared with intensive reading. Extensive reading is a very useful strategy to second language reading. One of the participants claims that: Extensive reading focuses on encouraging students to read beyond the text rather than on teaching the text itself. When learners read extensively, they read very easy, enjoyable books to improve their pace and fluency of reading. Extensive reading can help learners learn to read by actually reading. In pre-IELTS courses the candidates are not all alike to each other, so we suggest them to read some extra reading texts and books. We ask learners to choose the pieces of reading according to their interest. Generally, in reading part students should learn it is not necessary to read all parts of an unknown reading they have not seen it before. (T.P.6)

Significantly, T.P.10 declared: “We ask learners to choose the pieces of reading according to their interest. Generally, in reading part students should learn it is not necessary to read all parts of an unknown reading they have not seen it before.”

#### **4.3.1.1.6. Intensive Reading**

Intensive reading, which means reading in details with specific learning aims and tasks, is another strategy can help learners in Pre-IELTS courses. It can be compared with extensive reading, which involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. T.P.9

expressed his opinions as follows: In my pre-IELTS classes there is not homogeneity so you as an instructor should ask your learners to do some extra-curricular activities. Candidates can choose some reading text they like and then read it in details and answer some comprehension questions about the text. Reading in details helps them to find out keywords easily. So in the real IELTS exam they will not waste the time determining crucial keywords of the text. And this prepares them to act in the best way in their real exam.

#### **4.3.1.2. Pre-IELTS Materials**

As in pre-IELTS courses all learners are not at the same level of knowledge and there is not homogeneity in the class, so candidates themselves should study some extra sources for reading skill. Now IELTS instructor can be as a conductor of an orchestra. He should introduce some sources for grammar, vocabulary, reading, and other skills. One of the participants claims that:

First of all, English learners should have a placement test. Placement test assesses learners' readiness. It determines which levels they are in. Then according to their levels, I introduce some practical books. For instance, for grammar I suggest Grammar in Use, this book is categorized. Each unit consisted of two pages, first page teaches grammatical structures to learners and the second one give students some useful exercises. The answer keys are at the end of the book and it help learners to read this book as a self-study. For vocabulary Oxford Word Skill is one of the best. It classifies vocabulary based on the subject. Again this is a self-study book, it teaches learners some words in the text and then students are supposed to answer the related exercises. Here, again the answers are at the end of the book.

### **4.3.2. IELTS**

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which is the world's most popular English language proficiency test is used for higher education and global migration. IELTS assesses all of your English skills — reading, writing, listening and speaking, and is designed to reflect how you will use English at study, at work, and in your new life abroad. Candidates attend in IELTS courses with different intentions. Although in pre-IELTS courses students are heterogeneous, in IELTS courses most of the English learners are homogeneous.

#### **4.3.2.1. IELTS Techniques**

In IELTS exam time management plays a very prominent role in candidates' success. To save your time, you need to utilize some suitable techniques. Each skill has its own strategies. In this study all participants share their practical techniques for reading of the IELTS. These techniques can be divided into two main categories: task oriented techniques and general techniques.

##### **4.3.2.1.1. Task Oriented Techniques**

Task oriented techniques or task specific techniques refer to those ones which are directly related to the different types of questions of reading of IELTS.

###### **4.3.2.1.1.1. True/False/Not Given**

'True, False, Not Given' questions require you to identify if information in a text is true or not.

You will be given a number of factual statements and you have to check the text to see if they are true or not. T.P.1. argued that: These questions are related to those text which we call them as descriptive text. These reading texts are descriptions of a process. In 80 or 90% of the cases, a similar sentence, to the one asked in the questions, can be found in the text.

Another participant who is one of the most successful IELTS instructors claims that:

True/False/Not Given questions are basically like the Yes/No/Not Given questions. They differ

in one issue. True/False/Not Given questions are mostly opinion of somebody and Yes/No/Not Given questions are mostly related to fact items. (T.P.10)

In True/False/Not Given questions first of all you should be able to find the area of the answer. To do this T.P.5 expressed his opinion as follows:

First you as a reader should find the probable area of the answer, to do this you can use skimming and scanning. You find the possible area of the answer by skimming and if there is a new word you should utilize scanning to find the exact area of the answer. Then you should analyze the question, it is very important to understand the different parts of the question well to see whether they are given or not.

#### **4.3.2.1.1.2. Yes/No/Not Given**

In this type of reading question you should decide if the information or writers' opinion in the question statements can be found in the passage.

As one of the participants stated: Learners should pay attention to the tense of the question and the tense of the sentences in the passage whether the tense of these two sentences are similar or not. They should focus more on the adverbs of the sentences. Learners should concentrate on the verbs, especially auxiliary verbs. Whenever you have comparison, in 80 or 90 % of the cases the answer is Not Given. If the question has some word like never, always, everybody, or nobody, in this type of questions the answer is usually false. (T.P.3)

#### **4.3.2.1.1.3. Sentence Completion**

In this type of question, IELTS candidates should complete sentences by filling in the gap with words from the passage. T.P.5 talked about his experiences as follows: Sentence completion is a



challenging question, because it may be from different parts of the reading passage. But the forte of these questions is that it will be appeared in order in the text. So this point help students to follow the orders of parts of the passage. Sometimes readers cannot find the first question easily, so they can start this part with the next question which may be easier. When they continue this process, the harder questions will be trapped, and learners can find their area more easily.

#### **4.3.2.1.1.4. Table Completion**

English learners should complete the table using the correct word from the reading passage. One of the participants stated that:

Table completion questions are designed from a specific area of the reading text. Table completion questions are not necessarily appeared in order. In table completion questions finding the related area of the possible answer is easier, because a title is written above the table that shows from which area of the text these questions are designed. (T.P.4)

#### **4.3.2.1.1.5. Summary Completion**

Summary completion refers to those type pf questions in which learners should complete a summary by filling in the gaps using words from the passage or words given in a box. T.P.2 as one of the successful IELTS instructors expressed that:

The answers of summary completion questions can be located in different parts of the reading text. So these questions don't have necessarily orders. Summary completion questions are a general digest of the whole text. To answer these type of questions, first learners should identify the exact area of the possible answer. Because of that, it is always recommended to answer summary completion questions at the end to get a good knowledge of the text. When you become more familiar with the passage, then you can have a better comprehension of the reading text.

#### **4.3.2.1.1.6. Multiple Choice Questions**

For multiple choice questions, learners should choose the correct answer to a question or the correct ending to a sentence from usually 3 or 4 possible options. To this regard, one of the participants elaborated on the fact that: The answers to the comprehension questions can be found respectively in the text. That is, the answer to question 5 definitely precedes the answer to question 6. This fact can be of a great help.

... and also the distractors may be very destructive in the process of answering to the questions. Mostly the distractors can be found around the correct answer in the text. Since the candidate thinks that s/he has seen that sentence in the text, around the correct answer which might be needed to deduced, s/he might go for that wrong answer. (T.P.5)

#### **4.3.2.1.1.7. Paragraph Headings**

In this kind of task, the candidates are asked to choose the best heading for each paragraph. Regarding this type, T.P.6 stated that: ... most of the headings contain 3 to 5 words. Therefore, the candidates are advised to find one or two keywords in the heading. These keywords are normally stated explicitly in the topic sentence of each paragraph, which is usually the first or the last sentence of the paragraph. Hence, the candidate can save a great deal of time just by reading the first or the last sentence of each paragraph.

#### **4.3.2.1.1.8. Matching Questions**

In this task, the candidates are asked to match a sentence beginning to its correct ending, or a sentence to its meaning. Considering this type, T.P.9 mentioned that:

... Alike the multiple choice questions, these questions can also be found respectively in the text. That is, in case of facing a difficult question, the candidate can simply find an easier one and then go for the harder which is before or after that. The candidates are advised to read through all the beginnings and endings carefully.

#### **4.3.2.1.2. General Techniques**

General techniques in IELTS courses refer to those strategies which are overall used by some of the IELTS instructors.

##### **4.3.2.1.2.1. Mood Adjustment**

It refers to changing the way that candidates think about the reading section of exams.

As T.P.1 stated: An IELTS instructor needs to change the way that an examinee thinks about a reading task. The candidates have been taught to read the text once, then read the questions, and then find the answers in the text. But it is a waste of time. They should be aware that the right way to do a reading task is to read the questions first and then skim or scan the text to find the required information.

##### **4.3.2.1.2.2. Test wiseness**

Test wiseness refers to the familiarity of the IELTS candidates to the various types of the questions of the reading part. One of the participants claimed that: In the reading part of the IELTS we have different types of questions, each dealing with some useful techniques to be answered. If learners know various kinds of reading questions, they can have a better performance. When they face each questions, they will know how to deal with that and they will choose the best technique to answer it. (T.P.8)

#### **4.3.2.1.2.3. Paraphrasing**

This technique deals with the ability of the IELTS candidates to understand a sentence thoroughly and reword it. T.P.2 shared his experience as follows: The students in my class are asked to practice this technique through various exercises; e.g., they might be asked write the first half of the question and for the second half they are asked to paraphrase.

... due to the fact that many students are weak in paraphrasing, I, unlike many other instructors, ask the students to read the whole text once, but in meaningful chunks.

#### **4.3.2.1.2.4. Time Management**

Time management refers to how learners manage their time during the test .T.P.10 stated that: Students must be familiarized with the techniques of time management from the very beginning stages of the preparation courses. The candidates must learn that they are not advised to spend more time on a single task for the sake of answering more questions since it might lead to having less time for the probable easier tasks following.

In accordance with the last statement, T.P.9 declared that: “time management is not difficult as a concept, but it is too hard to do in practice. Learners can improve this skill by doing some practices”

#### **4.3.2.2. IELTS Materials**

The materials employed in IELTS class can make a very big difference in the success of candidates. Successful IELTS instructors recommended some books among a wide range of IELTS books. Here are some course books that T.P.1, T.P.3, T.P.7, and T.P.9 suggested:

Vocabulary for IELTS, Grammar for IELTS, The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS, and Improve Your Reading Skill are the most useful books. Vocabulary for IELTS and Grammar for IELTS are easier books for those who are at basic levels of English language. This book, The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS, considers the reading skill intensively, it is applicable for those instructors who want to teach reading in a short period of time. This book has classified the different types of reading texts and reading questions. And Improve Your Reading Skill is valuable because it has two types of books that each of them is designed for distinguished banned scores.

And the followings are the course books that T.P.6 recommended: IELTS Master Class, New Insight to IELTS, Complete IELTS. He believes that all of these three books can be considered as one IELTS package because all of them include the four skills completely and they have extra related exercises to help learners practice more.

#### **4.4. Code Relation Browser**

Code relation browser creates a visualization of the intersections of codes in either a single document, a group of activated documents, or all of the documents in the document system. This allows researcher to find connections or relationship between codes.

As it is shown in this figure there is a connection between summary completion and paraphrasing. Sentence completion and multiple choice are related too. Test wiseness is related to

determining key words. True/False/Not given has a relationship with mood adjustment, sentence completion, and reading depth. Sentence completion is also related to multiple choice and true/false/not given

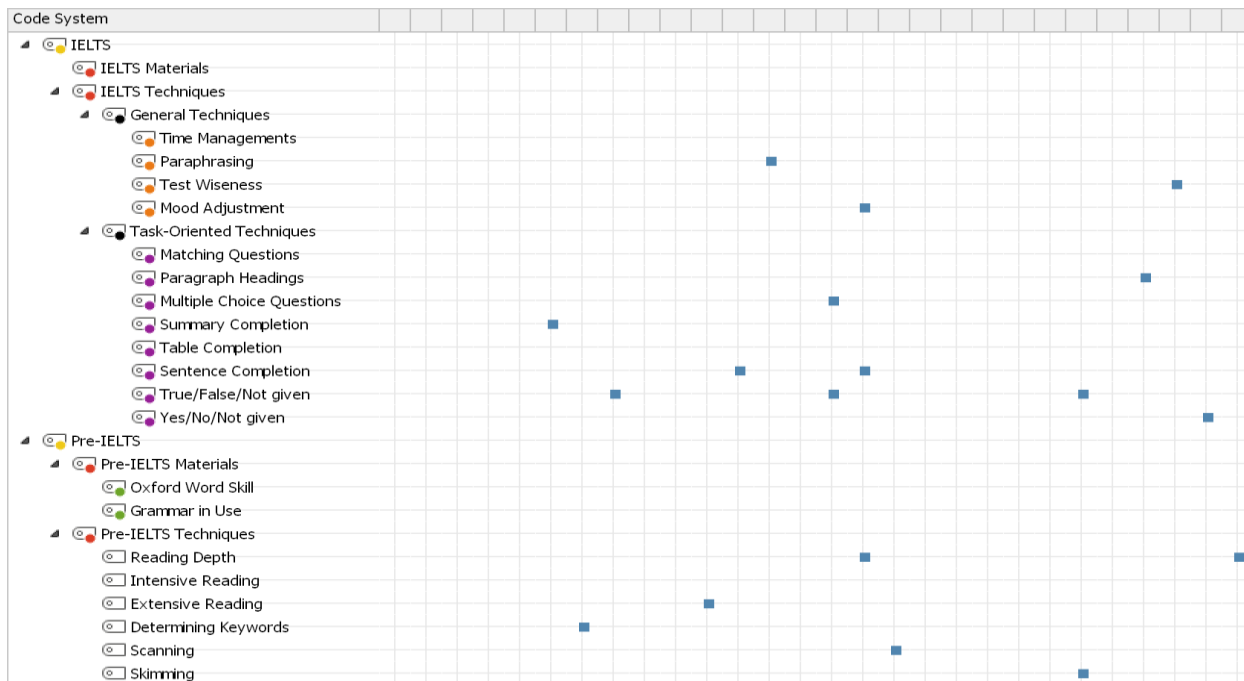


Figure 2. Code Relation Browser

#### 4.5. Charts Indicating the Frequency of Sub Codes

Here some bar graphs are presented. Figure 3 indicates that determining keywords as a technique in pre-IELTS course has the most frequency. Identifying key words help learners to comprehend the reading text better. Skimming, scanning, and reading depth has the same frequencies. And intensive reading and extensive reading have the least frequencies.

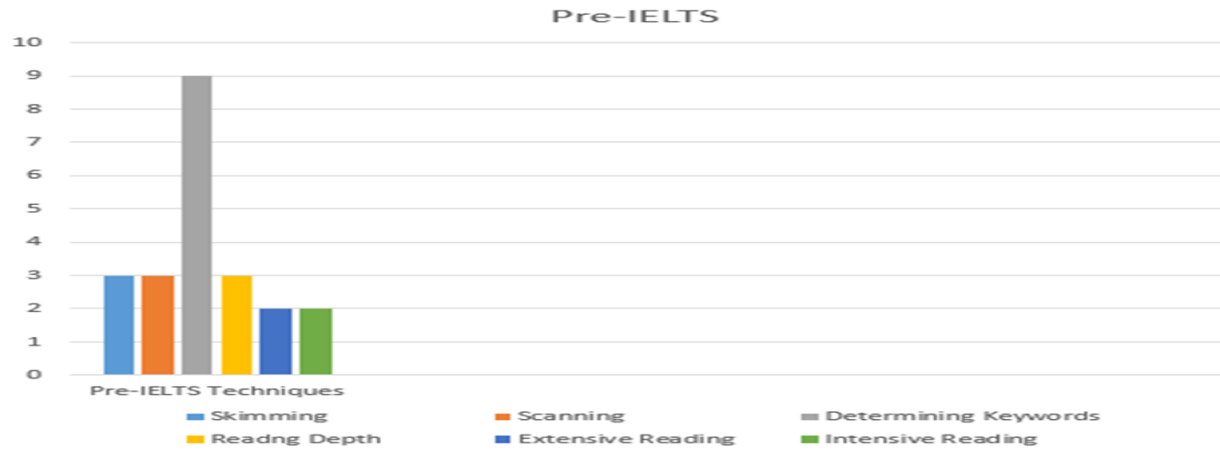


Figure 3. Pre-IELTS Techniques Bar Graph

In IELTS section like the pre-IELTS there are some useful techniques which are presented. Figure 4 shows that in IELTS part test wiseness technique has the most frequency. After test wiseness, paraphrasing and time management have the most frequencies. Finally, mood adjustment has the least frequency in IELTS courses.

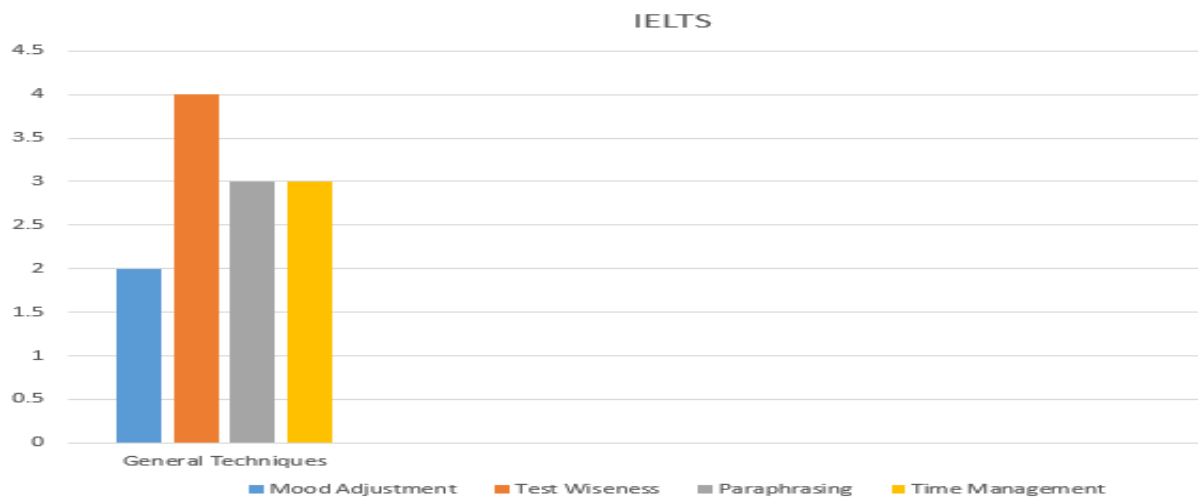


Figure 4. IELTS General Techniques Bar Graph

# **Chapter Five**

## **Discussion and Conclusion**



## **5.1. Overview**

In this study, we aimed at finding the widely accepted and useful techniques for teaching reading of IELTS. In spite of discovering practical techniques, knowing what materials are used by successful professional IELTS instructors for teaching reading of IELTS was the other objective of this study. To this end, researcher tried to find some of the professional IELTS instructors and to seek for the most useful techniques of teaching reading using by them.

In this last chapter of the study, Conclusion and final remarks of the study are presented and suggestions for further research as well as pedagogical implication are provided.

## **5.2. Discussion**

Nowadays, in modern world, being at a good level of English proficiency is very important, therefore trends towards standard English exams are continuously growing. The IELTS candidates need applicable techniques to overcome some big standard tests. According to some scientists, there are some reading comprehension strategies. Some researches indicate that reading comprehension strategies can be taught and that teaching them enhances comprehension (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Fung, Wilkinson, & Moore, 2003; Harris, 2007; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2003; Macaro & Elrer, 2008; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Zhang, 2008), it is noteworthy to mention that although many scholars confirmed the role of reading strategies in language learning, they have not specified a classification for these techniques and strategies. All those candidates participate in preparatory IELTS courses are not at the same level of English proficiency. They attend in these courses in different ages. They have various educational background knowledge and they also have different intentions for being attended in such classes. So preparatory courses for IELTS can be divided in two courses of: Pre-IELTS and IELTS which is considered in this study.

On the other hand, teaching reading in IELTS preparatory courses is driven by the findings of theory-driven studies rather than by experienced practitioner's insights, but this study aims at exploring the techniques and materials experienced practitioners use in teaching reading in IELTS preparatory courses. Being complementary to the findings of theory-driven studies, the findings of this study can be fed to pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. This study has clear implications for language teacher education in Iran and other similar context because in these contexts language teacher education is mainly driven by grand theories and principles of language education.

### **5.3. Implication for Practice**

By conducting new researches, investigators obtain more practical and valuable information. Definitely this study will have clear implications for language teaching and learning. Previous studies gave some strategies for reading comprehension, but they never refer to the techniques which are used by the most professional IELTS instructors. Previous researches focused mostly on theories of reading strategies that they were not as useful as the techniques which are used by professional IELTS instructors in real learning situations. By conducting this research some actual and authentic techniques and guidelines, which are utilized by the best IELTS instructors, will be added to the previous studies.

The research study's findings will be useful for those instructors who want to teach reading skill needed for IELTS exam. This study's findings help IELTS teachers to find out the best and the most practical techniques of professional IELTS instructors who teach reading in the best way. The findings will be useful for IELTS teachers who use only their experiences, but by reviewing the findings of this study they have the professional IELTS teachers' experiences too. This study will be significant because researcher wants to introduce the most practical techniques which are

used by the best IELTS instructors. Some of the IELTS teachers know some techniques, but these techniques are based on previous theories with no connection to real language learning environments. On the other hand, the presented techniques by professional IELTS instructors are based on their real experiences which are very valuable.

#### **5.4. Suggestion for Further Studies**

Although many different issues have been addressed at in this study, some others need to be taken into consideration in other studies. One of which might be the techniques through which an instructor can increase the reading pace of the candidates since one of the demanding tasks for the candidates in the reading section of the test is to manage to answer read the text and the questions in the time given. So the candidates are advised to take up proper strategies to work on the speed reading techniques.

Another issue worth paying attention might be the ability to read beyond the lines. As it was previously mentioned, not all the answers are stated explicitly; hence, the candidates are expected to have a grasp of pragmatics; that is, they need to elicit the needed information from the context through some deductive and inference making techniques.

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## چکیده

آموزش مهارت خواندن در دوره های آمادگی آزمون آیلتس بیشتر از اینکه تحت تاثیر دیدگاه فعالین باتجربه در این زمینه باشد، توسط یافته های مطالعات مبتنی بر تئوری مشخص می گردد. برای پر کردن این خلاء، هدف این تحقیق بررسی تکنیک ها و مواد آموزشی مورد استفاده توسط فعالین باتجربه در تدریس مهارت خواندن در دوره های آمادگی آزمون آیلتس می باشد. با استفاده از روش فرآیند نمونه گیری هدفمند به همراه نظریه داده بنیاد، این تحقیق به صورت تئوری، دیدگاه دوازده فعال را که مشغول به تدریس در موسسات خصوصی زبان در مشهد، مرکز استان خراسان رضوی، ایران هستند بررسی می کند. با توجه به آنالیز و جمع آوری چرخشی داده، لغات کلیدی زیر مطرح می شوند: معادل سازی، عمق خواندن، تطبیق حالت، هوشمندی آزمون، مدیریت زمان، و تکنیک های تمرین محور به عنوان تکنیک های مورد استفاده معمول توسط شرکت کنندگان در تحقیق. به علاوه برخی از مواد آموزشی مفید مورد استفاده این مدرسین معرفی گردید. به طور حتم این تحقیق کاربردهای روشنی برای تدریس و یادگیری زبان دارد. تحقیقات گذشته استراتژی هایی را برای درک مطلب مهارت خواندن ارائه داده اند، اما هرگز اشاره ای به تکنیک های مورد استفاده توسط مدرسین حرفه ای آزمون آیلتس نکرده اند. تحقیقات گذشته بیشتر بر تئوری های استراتژی های مهارت خواندن تاکید داشتند که به سودمندی تکنیک های مورد استفاده توسط مدرسین حرفه ای آیلتس در شرایط واقعی یادگیری نبودند. با انجام این تحقیق، برخی رهنمون ها و تکنیک های حقیقی و مورد استفاده در واقعیت که توسط بهترین مدرسین آیلتس مورد استفاده می گردند به تحقیقات گذشته اضافه شدند.

**لغات کلیدی:** تکنیک های تدریس، قسمت مهارت خواندن آزمون آیلتس، دیدگاههای مدرسین، نظریه پردازی





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کشف تکنیک ها و مواد آموزشی مدرسین زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجه در آموزش مهارت خواندن به

داوطلبان آزمون آیلتس

نگارنده : مریم یوسفی ثمره

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